

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)
)
Advanced Methods to Target and Eliminate) CG Docket No. 17-59
Unlawful Robocalls)

COMMENTS OF COMCAST CORPORATION

Comcast Corporation (“Comcast”) submits these comments in response to the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (“*FNPRM*”) issued on November 17, 2017 in the above-captioned proceeding.¹

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Comcast commends the Commission for its continued work with industry stakeholders to combat illegal robocalls relying on “spoofed” caller ID information. As the Commission has correctly recognized, these calls enable bad actors to “lure consumers into scams, including identity theft,” by “alter[ing] or manipulat[ing]” caller ID information “so that the name or number displayed to the called party does not match that of the actual [caller] or the actual originating number.”² Comcast is proud to be an industry leader in ongoing efforts to curtail these abusive practices—including by spearheading the development of the SHAKEN (Signature-based Handling of Asserted Information Using toKENs) and STIR (Secure Telephone Identity Revisited) framework for caller ID authentication, serving as a leading member of the

¹ See *Advanced Methods to Target and Eliminate Unlawful Robocalls*, CG Docket No. 17-59, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 17-151 (rel. Nov. 17, 2017) (“*Robocall Blocking Order*” or “*FNPRM*”).

² *Id.* ¶ 3.

Robocall Strike Force organized by the Commission in 2016, and offering call control tools that empower Comcast customers to identify and prevent illegal spoofed robocalls.³ The Commission’s recent *Robocall Blocking Order* represents an important step forward in facilitating efforts to block certain types of illegal spoofed robocalls by enabling voice providers to honor “Do-Not-Originate” requests from number assignees and to address spoofing methods involving invalid, unallocated, or unassigned numbers.⁴ While widespread implementation of SHAKEN and STIR will ultimately provide a more complete solution to the scourge of illegal spoofed robocalls,⁵ the measures adopted in the *Robocall Blocking Order* undoubtedly will prove beneficial to consumers in the interim.

The *FNPRM* appended to the *Robocall Blocking Order* raises important questions regarding the implementation of these call blocking methods, including exploring ways to enable individuals and entities to inform voice providers when calls are being blocked erroneously.⁶ As

³ See Comments of Comcast Corp., CG Docket No. 17-59, at 2-4 (filed July 3, 2017) (“Comcast Robocall NPRM/NOI Comments”).

⁴ See *Robocall Blocking Order* ¶¶ 10, 18.

⁵ See Comcast Robocall NPRM/NOI Comments at 5-10 (urging the Commission to pave the way for broad adoption of SHAKEN and STIR authentication standards); see also Comments of Comcast Corp., WC Docket No. 17-97, at 3-5 (filed Aug. 14, 2017) (“Comcast Call Authentication Comments”) (describing ongoing industry efforts to develop and implement SHAKEN and STIR protocols). As Comcast has noted, because SHAKEN and STIR protocols “are largely reliant on IP-based standards, the Commission also should do everything it can to facilitate the transition to IP-based networks, which in turn will facilitate IP-to-IP interconnection and enable widespread adoption and implementation of SHAKEN and STIR.” Comcast Robocall NPRM/NOI Comments at 6.

⁶ With respect to the *FNPRM*’s questions on how the Commission should “measure the effectiveness of [its] robocalling efforts,” *FNPRM* ¶ 59, Comcast submits that the Commission can and should rely on industry reporting initiatives—akin to the reports generated by the Robocall Strike Force—to make its assessment. The Robocall Strike Force reports provided the Commission with significant and valuable insight into efforts to curtail illegal spoofed robocalls, including discussions of industry’s progress in

discussed below, Comcast believes that the Commission can address this issue without imposing undue burdens. More specifically, the Commission could require voice providers to establish their own easy-to-find web pages that individuals or entities can then use to report erroneous call blocking. These web pages also could be used to report any erroneous “tagging” of calls as potentially abusive, and could provide customers with contact information for any third-party vendor a provider uses to manage its call-blocking or call-tagging features.

DISCUSSION

COMCAST SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO ADDRESS ERRONEOUS BLOCKING OR TAGGING OF LEGITIMATE CALLS

Comcast welcomes the Commission’s inquiry into possible ways “to ensure that erroneously blocked calls can be unblocked as quickly as possible and without undue harm to callers and consumers.”⁷ Comcast has noted previously that some call blocking techniques pose a “risk that legitimate callers would find themselves blocked” erroneously—when, for instance, an individual is assigned a new number that had been properly designated for blocking in the recent past because the number was unallocated or unassigned.⁸ The *Robocall Blocking Order*

implementing various techniques and the effectiveness of those techniques in screening out abusive calls. Indeed, given that the Commission relied on the Robocall Strike Force reports in adopting the current rules, *see, e.g., Robocall Blocking Order* ¶¶ 5, 6, 11, 15, it would be entirely reasonable for the agency to commission and then rely on further reports from the Strike Force in measuring the effectiveness of its rules. By contrast, undertaking potentially burdensome data collections from individual voice providers would be unnecessary and unwise, particularly when, as noted below, the blocking methods set forth in the *Robocall Blocking Order* likely will be superseded by widespread implementation of the SHAKEN and STIR call authentication protocols. *See infra* at 5.

⁷ FNPRM ¶ 57.

⁸ Comcast Robocall NPRM/NOI Comments at 20.

appropriately adopts measures designed to minimize this risk,⁹ and “encourage[s] providers who block calls to establish a means for a caller whose number is blocked to contact the provider to remedy the problem.”¹⁰ The *FNPRM*’s questions about specific avenues for unblocking erroneously blocked numbers are a natural outgrowth of the legitimate concerns reflected in the record and in the *Robocall Blocking Order*.

In Comcast’s view, an effective way to facilitate unblocking in this scenario without imposing undue burdens on voice providers or consumers would be to adopt a rule requiring all voice providers to establish their own easy-to-find web pages enabling individuals and entities to report erroneous blocking. Such a web page could, for instance, provide contact information for the team responsible for managing call blocking for the voice provider, or could furnish a short and simple form that, when completed, would generate a “ticket” to be resolved by the relevant personnel. This approach likely would prove highly effective at addressing any erroneous blocking, as voice providers have strong incentives to act on and remediate any erroneous blocking as soon as they become aware of the issue—especially given voice providers’ market-driven desire to ensure the seamless completion of customers’ legitimate calls. Moreover, this approach would avoid the need for the Commission to devise and mandate a one-size-fits-all “challenge mechanism”¹¹ when a flexible approach can better accommodate the different

⁹ See, e.g., *Robocall Blocking Order* ¶ 24 (allowing a voice provider to block calls purporting to originate from unallocated numbers when the provider “ha[s] knowledge that a certain block of numbers has not been allocated to any provider”); *id.* ¶ 32 (allowing a voice provider to block calls purportedly originating from allocated but unassigned numbers “so long as the provider blocking the calls is the allocatee of the number or has obtained verification from the allocatee that the number is unused at the time of the blocking”).

¹⁰ *Id.* ¶ 55.

¹¹ *Cf. FNPRM* ¶ 57.

robocall blocking and mitigation options made available by different providers. In addition, it would be particularly unwise to institute an entirely new and compulsory procedural mechanism for challenging blocking under the methods set forth in the *Robocall Blocking Order*, when those methods are likely to be superseded by broad-scale implementation of SHAKEN and STIR—a far more accurate and comprehensive approach for addressing illegal spoofed robocalls—in the not-too-distant future.¹²

In adopting such a rule, the Commission should consider specifying that providers also enable individuals or entities to report any erroneous “tagging” of calls as abusive through these web pages. Many voice providers make tools available to their customers that use complex algorithms and analytics to identify certain numbers as likely sources of illegal robocalls or nuisance calls. Rather than blocking calls from such numbers outright, some tools “tag” such calls on device displays with labels such as “nuisance likely” or “scam likely” so that consumers can decide whether to accept or decline the calls. Such services undoubtedly bring benefits to consumers and help empower them to make informed choices when screening out abusive calls. However, these tools, like some of the blocking techniques described in the *Robocall Blocking Order*, run the risk of generating “false positives,” where a tool’s algorithm erroneously tags a legitimate call as abusive and causes the consumer to decline the call. Comcast has seen these harms firsthand, as it has been reported to us that customer-desired calls such as service appointment reminders have been tagged as “nuisance likely.” Given that the erroneous tagging of calls can produce results that are just as harmful as erroneous blocking, the Commission should strongly consider facilitating the reporting of erroneous tagging through voice providers’

¹² See Comcast Call Authentication Comments at 3-5 (describing industry efforts to refine and implement the SHAKEN and STIR framework).

web pages. Reporting mechanisms should allow for reports of erroneous tagging from end users as well as other phone service providers. Moreover, to the extent that voice providers rely on third-party vendors to manage their blocking and/or tagging tools, the Commission should specify that voice providers' web pages include contact information for those vendors as well, so that unblocking or untagging requests can be processed expeditiously by the relevant entity.

CONCLUSION

Comcast applauds the Commission's ongoing efforts to combat illegal spoofed robocalls, and looks forward to working with the Commission on measures to address any erroneous blocking or tagging of calls as discussed herein.

Respectfully submitted,

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